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BROCK'S BANTER: Is it size that counts, or your expectations?

By Brock Weir

There is something to be said to the art of setting up to fail ? or coming very close to the edge.
Often these days we see it in the world of commerce and finance, such as the demise of Sears Canada, a store that was never really seen as cutting edge or one with the hipster. And yet, they tried to tap into this market with the ill-advised marketing campaign, ?WTS?!?
Okay, I'm going to state the obvious. You've been warned. This was, of course, a play on the popular net-cronym ?WTF?!? which means? well, you all know what that stands for but, in this case, ?WTS?!? meant ?What the Sears?!?
Perhaps I'm alone in this ? and considering the liquid assets flowing out the doors at Upper Canada Mall I suspect I'm not ? but I cringed every time I came across that campaign. As a millennial (and yes, I looked it up. Apparently I just made the cut) it smacked of pandering to an elusive demographic disguised as a very bad ?dad joke.?
It certainly didn't make me itch to walk into Sears and, I suspect it turned off the very market it was intended to reach.
Another example, to my mind, is Canada Post. While the Crown Corporation continues to chug along, its operations have seemed rather counterintuitive. Faced with losing their market share of letter mail to email and package delivery to increasingly competitive courier services, they?responded by hiking their rates across their spectrum of services to make up the shortfall rather than lure customers back with potential savings and incentives.
We'll see how this unlikely approach to survival will serve Canada Post at the end, but it seems a formula destined for failure.
The art of setting up for failure, of course, is not limited to commerce.
We can see it all around us but, if you're looking for a sign post, think back to 2014.
If your eyes didn't gloss over from the sheer number of names thrown at you ? 28 people vying for eight Council seats alone ? you will remember there were two additional questions on the ballot.
One of the questions was whether Aurora residents would like to see the Town divided up into electoral wards. Perhaps it was lack of interest, perhaps there was a degree of boundary fatigue after the failed fight to avoid a Federal division at Wellington Street, but this question failed to set the Town on fire.
The second question, however, was a different story.
Of those who bothered to show up to cast their vote, the majority voted to shrink the size of Council from a Mayor and eight Councillors to the Mayor and six.
This would have been that, but, like so many things in Aurora, it was far from that.
In order for the resolution to have been binding on Council, a certain threshold of eligible voters had to have been interested enough to make the trip to their local polling station. Rare are the times our voter turnout cracks the 40 per cent mark, so naturally ? and predictably ? the referendum numbers fell well short of the threshold.
8,060 electors voted in favour of reducing Council's size compared to 4,427 opting for the status quo. Ordinarily, these numbers would seem fairly decisive but Councillor Paul Pirri was ultimately the lone vote in taking these numbers as the will of Aurorans.
?I do think [with] the votes cast in that direction we do have a very strong indication of what the residents in our community want to see as the composition of Council,? he said at the time. ?As a two-time eighth place finisher in the elections here in Aurora, it is not about what I think works best for me, but what I think works well for our residents. Ultimately, I think the residents have the right to choose how they are represented, and they spoke very clearly about how they are represented, in my view.?
An argument offered against solidifying the results of the referendum was the numbers simply didn't provide anything to Council for them to interpret ?why? voters cast their ballot the way they did, as though the whys were relevant in any way.
?It is hard to get into what the mind of the electorate was, and maybe that is the fault of the question itself,? offered Councillor Jeff Thom. ?The results should definitely be taken into consideration, but 64 per cent of 32 per cent of the eligible electorate voted for it. In the grand scheme of things, the majority of voters didn't. That's semantics, but I am sticking with it.?
But Council might not be sticking with what they ultimately decided.
This week, as The Auroran previously reported, Council will be considering a motion from Councillor Sandra Humfryes calling on Council to lay the groundwork in reducing its membership from eight to six for the 2018 ? 2022 Council term.
As we go to press before this week's Council meeting, I will be very interested in the lengthy and passionate discussions that are bound to ensue. Ultimately, however, I think the voters have already spoken on this issue and the numbers were decisive.
Reducing any semblance of Council Bloat will only be part of the issue though.

Whenever Council broaches this particularly thorny topic, the light at the end of the tunnel is always clouded by the issue of whether or not a smaller complement of councillors should be considered six full time positions ? and paid as such ? rather than the current formula of eight part-time positions.
To my mind, Council size and workload are two entirely separate issues and the size needs to be tackled first.
Once that is done and out of the way then a very fruitful, important and long-overdue discussion can be had not just around the Council table but in the wider community: What do Aurora residents expect from their Council members?
Aurorans will then need to consider if they believe they will be better served by six members fully dedicated to the municipality without having to juggle a day job as well. They will need to also consider whether they will be willing to pay a salary commensurate with full-time duties rather than the $30k each of the eight currently receives for their part-time services.*
Finally, those individuals who have ever thought about stepping up to represent their neighbours by contesting an election will have a lot more to weigh. If they are expected to fully dedicate their careers to the servicing their constituents, would it make them think twice? Would that make civic life more or less attractive?
In the end, that could help narrow down the playing field to those with the best intentions and the best interests of the community at heart rather than those looking to boost their resume or inflate their ego.
But that first step needs to be taken. Voters have asked for it.

*I recognize that a Councillor's workload is more than the average part-time job, but I am simply talking about the official job description.